

RISK ANALYSIS IN THE FRENCH PART OF THE ENGLISH CHANNEL AND NORTH SEA

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Abstract

Risk analysis is of a paramount importance for coastal states if we want to have fitting contingency plans and appropriate structures and equipments. The objectives are to prevent, to protect and to fight. Like many other coastal states we have been practising risk analysis for years in France and risk analysis is getting more and more accurate in time. Investigations on board a vessel with an assessment team, or sending an aircraft to evaluate pollution are a way to make a case by case risk analysis, but the risk analysis method is to gather a lot of information to prevent and to cure. My intention is to illustrate my words with examples. So I will show you some figures and pictures that will speak clearly. Let me present the Channel and the North Sea which is the smallest maritime zone in France but which is a good example of all threats we have to face.

Identification of the threats

What are the threats?

It is important to know precisely what the global maritime traffic in the area is. If we study the figures for the Channel we are impressed by the importance of maritime activity in this area which matches with the Malacca Strait.

Busy means risky, you can not have a high density of maritime flow without a certain level of risk, we have to do our best to reduce this risk taking in mind that risk zero does not exist.

The second step in studying the traffic in an area is to take into account all the maritime routes or links. It gives you a more precise idea of the places where we must focus our attention.

The third step is to have accurate and updated information about the very nature of the goods transported. This information is important for response in case of an accident.

Another concern are the prevailing weather conditions and currents in the zone.

Identification of the vulnerable zones

The vulnerability has to be considered from different points of view: ecological point of view, economic point of view, national interest, ...

Ecological point of view

All sensitive areas having regards with International conventions or EU regulations have to be taken into account.

In the English Channel which is a special area within the MARPOL convention, we have some smaller zones which are protected on behalf of the UN Ramsar convention, or on EU Natura 2000 directive, and we have national nature reserves.

Economic point of view

We have to take into account all the coastal industrial equipments, coastal industrial estates, nuclear power plants , harbors, fishing farms, oyster-farming, touristic beaches (in summer).

The use of data concerning risk analysis

Prevention of accidents, emergency response and a good risk analysis allow States to take relevant pro-active and reactive measures.

Past uses of the gathering of data concerning risk analysis

The first use of risk analysis was to prevent accidents. Studying maritime accident figures led us to propose TSS implementation in the Channel in the seventies (in close cooperation with our British colleagues). It led us to set up MRCC in these areas (seventies) and to settle Emergency Towing Vessels (eighties).

The high density of the traffic led us to prohibit some activities (unorthodox crossing in the Dover Strait, swimming in the Dover Strait, ship to ship transfers in the French territorial waters) (nineties) and to request mandatory reports for tankers.

Risk analysis: current use

Risk analysis is now part of a big project to provide relevant information for maritime authorities. Risk analysis is more reactive now and risk analysis is helpful in emergency situations.

France is preparing a new device that will provide all kinds of information for maritime authorities when we face a threat. This new software device is called Geographic Information System.

The problem of place and port of refuge is typically a question of risk analysis that combines database and information collected by an assessment team.

But risk analysis is a method that is also useful when we study new economic projects such as marine aggregates extraction or settlement of wind-farms.